

The Wilds of Lincolnshire

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Doddington
Day 2	Donna Nook NNR and Lincs coast
Day 3	RSPB Langford and LWT Whisby
Day 4	Doddington Hall Estate



Departs

November – February

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR368)

Grading

A. Easy day walks

Focus

Birds, mammals and conservation



Highlights

- Donna Nook NNR Grey Seal Colony during pupping season (Nov & Dec)
- Flocks of waders at RSPB Frampton (Jan & Feb)
- Private tour of the flagship rewilding project at Doddington Hall Estate
- Led by an expert naturalist guide



Images from top: Grey Seals, Doddington Hall & Golden Plover



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Introduction

This short break showcases the best winter wildlife in the often overlooked county of Lincolnshire, alongside a tour of the pioneering rewilding project at Doddington Hall Estate.

Lincolnshire, one of England's largest and least densely populated counties, is not as well known for its wildlife. Yet with extensive rural areas and farmland, and long stretches of undeveloped coastline, it is well worth a visit, especially during the winter. Staying in the grounds of Doddington Hall Estate, we will gain unique, firsthand knowledge of the work being done here by the Wilder Doddington team, as well as being well situated to explore both the inland and coastal habitats of this quiet part of the country.

We begin with a tour of Doddington Hall itself, a red-brick Elizabethan mansion built at the end of the 16th century, and a fine example of its era with formal gardens and extensive grounds.

The following day we head to the coast and visit the Grey Seal colony at Donna Nook NNR, which at this time of year (November) is in the peak of the pupping season. Scores of seals are hauled out on the sandy beaches with mothers tending newborn pups. The views are incredible and it must rank as one of the best close wildlife spectacles in the UK. Many birds are also attracted to this stretch of coastline and there is a new coastal realignment at Pye's Hall and nearby Covenham Reservoir that we can explore. We can expect a range of waders and wildfowl and flocks of wintering Pink-footed and Brent Geese. Short-eared Owl may quarter the saltmarsh and Golden Plover and Lapwing should be present in good numbers. If we are lucky, Twite and Snow Bunting are possible.



Should this tour take place in January or February, when the pupping season is over, we will visit RSPB Frampton Marsh, which is fast becoming one of Britain's premier birding destinations. It has been designed and is managed to allow rotational management of the scrapes, all in the name of increasing breeding and wintering bird numbers. Being next to The Wash, it is a magnet for waders and you may see thousands of Golden Plovers, occasionally taking to the air in a bid to outmanoeuvre a hunting Peregrine. Brent Geese and Wigeon show very well at Frampton and there are usually some Whooper Swans hanging around. Other raptor species seen regularly in winter include Marsh and Hen Harriers, Kestrel and Merlin.

The next day we spend inland visiting RSPB Langford Lowfields, an expansive floodplain habitat, home to large numbers of wildfowl and other wintering species, and LWT Whisby Nature Park, which combines reedbeds, scrub, and open water. Amongst many others we could see Great, Little and Cattle Egrets; Goldeneye, Pochard and Pintail; various finches and thrushes, plus birds of prey

patrolling overhead such as Marsh Harrier and Peregrine Falcon. There is also the possibility of ending the day with a Starling murmuration and maybe a quartering Barn Owl.

The holiday concludes with a behind-the-scenes tour of the Doddington Hall Estate, where we will learn about Wilder Doddington – a flagship rewilding project. Doddington is the largest inland nature site in Lincolnshire and we will explore the varied mix of parkland, woodland, and pasture, seeing how the site is managed by various different grazing livestock. This mix of cows, pigs, horses and deer is crucial in maintaining open habitats, encouraging natural regeneration, and supporting a diverse community of birds and small mammals.

Itinerary

The programme for the tour will be kept flexible, in order to make best use of the prevailing weather conditions and to maximise our chances of seeing key species. Our leaders will make decisions on the day as to exactly where we will go. However, the itinerary below offers an illustration of our planned programme of excursions.

Day 1

Arrive Doddington

Your tour leader will meet you at Doddington Hall at 1430 hours for a tour of the Elizabethan-era manor and the formal gardens. After that we will make our way to and settle in at the accommodation on the estate, which will be our base for the next three nights. We will meet again a bit later and head over to a pub in a neighbouring village for dinner.

Day 2 Donna Nook NNR & surrounding area or RSPB Frampton Marsh

For November and December departures of this tour, we will drive eastwards to the Grey Seal colony at Donna Nook which is a National Nature Reserve (NNR). At this time of year it becomes one of the most important Grey Seal breeding sites in England. Adults begin arriving from late October, with numbers building quickly through November as cows give birth to white-coated pups



Grey Seal pup

along the upper beach and dune edge. The close but managed viewing access allows detailed observation of natural breeding behaviour without disturbance, with females nursing young pups while larger males patrol territories nearby. Pups remain on the beach for several weeks, gradually moulting from white fur to a darker juvenile coat before entering the sea. Counts vary each year, but recent seasons have recorded well over a thousand pups, with several hundred adults present at peak times.

Beyond the seals, the surrounding area supports a wide range of birds and we will spend the rest of the day in the vicinity. Flocks of Pink-footed, Greylag and Brent Geese feed on the pools, while

Knot, Lapwing, Redshank, Dunlin, Curlew and other waders gather on the tides. Twite and Snow Bunting may feed along the dunes, and Horned Lark is sometimes observed here. Raptors are often present, with Hen Harrier a possibility, plus Peregrine and Short-eared Owl hunting across the marshes.

For January or February dates we set off in a south-easterly direction, heading for RSPB Frampton Marsh at the southern end of the Lincolnshire coast. The marsh and pools here in the winter are buzzing with activity, as many species of waders use the reserve to roost and feed at various times of the day. High tide sees birds stream in from The Wash to roost: thousands of Knot, Golden Plover, Redshank, Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwit can usually be seen, as well as a few overwintering species such as Avocet, and Spotted Redshank.



Knot

However, it is not all about waders. Frampton is one of a few sites that can see over 100 birds recorded in a day. A variety of farmland, wetland and coastland provides a good diversity of habitat, hosting rare breeders like Corn Bunting and wintering raptors such as Merlin and Peregrine. The trick is to try and pick one out amongst the swirling maelstrom of birds!

Day 3 RSPB Langford Lowfields & LWT Whisby Nature Park

This morning we head to nearby Langford Lowfields, a relatively recent RSPB reserve that is developing into one of the most important sites in the region. The site sits along the River Trent and the restored wetland habitats, created from former quarry workings, now support extensive reedbeds, open water and wet grassland that hold large numbers of birds through the colder months. Whooper Swan and Pink-footed Goose may pass overhead or feed nearby, and the open



Short-eared Owl

pools will hold Wigeon, Teal and Shoveler; often mixed with Pochard and Goldeneye. Lapwings gather on exposed mud and grass margins, while Snipe feed quietly along wetter edges. The reedbeds hold Water Rail and occasionally Bittern, which we would be very lucky to see, plus Marsh Harrier may quarter the reeds overhead.

In the afternoon we move on to LWT Whisby Nature Park, a series of flooded gravel pits, scrub and woodland that support a varied winter bird community. Large open lakes attract diving and surface-feeding ducks, while surrounding hedges and woodland hold small passerines and Redwing and Fieldfare, often feeding on berries during cold spells. Regular species include Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Goosander, Little and Great Crested Grebes whilst Redpoll, Reed Bunting, Kingfisher and Cetti's Warbler are occasionally

seen or heard in the dense waterside vegetation. If we are lucky, there is often a large Starling murmuration on Grebe Lake, which would make an exciting end to the day.

Day 4

Doddington Hall Estate

This morning we will walk the Doddington Hall Estate grounds in the company of the Wilder Doddington team. This is a unique chance to see the early stages of a flagship rewilding project, with a plan to turn intensively farmed arable fields, heavily grazed grassland and woodland into a haven for nature. The process started in June 2021 by allowing the land to breathe, rest and recover, and natural regeneration of the vegetation to occur. To give a helpful nudge to some processes, ponds and wetlands have been added, and we will cover the innovative work that has been done in partnership with the River Restoration Centre and Freshwater Habitats Trust. Proxies for missing keystone species include Lincoln Red cattle, Exmoor ponies, Mangalitza pigs and wild deer. Already insect, bird and animal life are beginning to thrive and avian highlights have already included Common Crane, Cattle and Great Egrets, a wintering Great Grey Shrike and a pair of Peregrine Falcons nesting in an abandoned Raven nest. Whilst there is a good chance of seeing Peregrine during our visit, the others are less likely, but we will still be keeping a close eye out for other birds such as Marsh Harrier, winter thrushes and tits.



We will break for lunch at one of the estate's eateries and continue the tour afterwards, learning in detail about how the project has unfolded so far and their exciting plans for the future. The tour will conclude at 1530 hours, in time for people to make their return journeys home. There will be the option to make a return drop for those who arranged it to nearby Lincoln train station.

Tour Grading

A. There will be easy walking on this holiday, covering between three and five miles per day, at a slow wildlife-watching pace, on largely flat ground, interspersed with some time spent in hides. Some areas may be muddy underfoot. This tour is suitable for birdwatchers of all abilities and those interested in learning more about conservation and rewilding.

Accommodation & Food

We will be staying at accommodation on Doddington Hall Estate.

The holiday cost includes accommodation on a half-board basis (breakfast and evening meals), starting with dinner on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 4. Breakfasts will be a mixture of continental provisions in the accommodations and at a café on the estate, whilst dinners will be a mixture of nearby pubs and the Grainstore Restaurant on the estate.

Lunches are not included, but there will be opportunities on each day to purchase sandwiches, etc., from local shops or cafés. Please bring with you any snacks or drinks that you want during the rest of the day.

There is a variety of accommodation on the estate, and we have two of them on an exclusive basis:

SHAKESPEARE COTTAGE

Shakespeare Cottage is an attractively converted barn and is the most modern property on the estate. This property is renovated to a high standard and has every modern convenience whilst retaining all the character and charm of the original building.

The cottage comprises the following:

- Ground floor bedroom with en suite wet room
- A further three double en suite bedrooms
- Large, well-equipped kitchen & dining space
- Private garden
- On-site parking

THE TAILOR ROOMS

The Tailor Rooms consist of four en suite bedrooms: one spacious ground-floor family room sleeping up to four (two adults and two children) and three first-floor double en suite bedrooms. The Tailor Rooms have tea- and coffee-making facilities only.

The Tailor Rooms offer more privacy, as they are more akin to hotel rooms, whereas Shakespeare Cottage has en suite rooms in the cottage and a communal living area. There is no difference in the tour price between the two types of accommodation – please state your preference at the time of booking.

Weather

Winter is likely to be cold and damp, but participants should be prepared for all eventualities, from heavy rain to hopefully some winter sunshine! We hope for the latter, but cold, wet conditions are likely.

Clothing & Equipment

Warm and waterproof clothing and footwear are essential. Waterproof jacket and trousers should be brought with you. Several thinner layers, as opposed to one thick layer, are the best way to keep warm and can be removed if the temperature increases.

We would recommend that all tour participants bring a pair of binoculars with them (and a scope would be useful as well). A daypack for carrying items and a refillable water bottle should be brought with you.

Joining the Tour

Your leader will meet you at 1430 hours at Doddington Hall, after which we will make our way to the accommodation. If you wish to join the tour by train, we can pick you up at Lincoln train station at 1400 hours and drop you there again at no later than 1600 hours on the final day. Please let us know if you are intending to arrive by train and would like to be picked up.

Inclusions/Exclusions

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- Accommodation on half-board basis
- Minibus transportation to locations visited
- All guiding
- Excursion costs or entrance fees associated with planned activities

The following costs are **not** included and should be budgeted for:

- Lunches
- Drinks
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs
- Activities not included in the tour

How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate which accommodation you would like at the time of booking.

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